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SUBJECT: EASTERN SUDAN PEACE AGREEMENT: A STRUGGLE TO IMPLEMENT

CLASSIFIED BY: CDA Jennifer A. McIntyre, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: The disunity between Eastern Front(EF) leaders continues to obstruct implementation of the Eastern Sudan Peace Agreement (ESPA). While in the past, they appeared to be working together constructively, the internal fissures within the EF and the lack of any formal structure have proven too much for the weak leadership to overcome. In response, the Eritrean mediators - who need the ESPA to be successful - and the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) have called for additional resources and support to help the EF address the current situation. Even with these stepped-up efforts, the ESPA may not ultimately succeed, thus preventing the people of Eastern Sudan from reaping the benefits of the agreement, and possibly undermining the Eritreans' careful efforts over the past year to build their reputation as a regional leader and garner support for their bid to assume the role of mediator for a Darfur negotiation. End Summary.

THE EF FRACTURES; THE MEDIATOR AND SPLM STEP IN

12. (U) After months of fruitless discussions regarding how to allocate the 120 political positions granted to the East under the ESPA, EF leaders sought out the Eritrean mediator the beginning of May and requested he determine how the positions should be distributed. The EF leaders agreed to the mediator's proposal that 60 of the positions be distributed based on tribal representation within the EF: 18 positions for the Hadendawa, 16 for the BeniAmer, 14 for the Rashaida and the remaining 12 for the other ethnic groups, such as the Nubians, represented in the EF. The individuals for these positions would be nominated by the leaders of their respective tribes and ultimately vetted for final approval by Sudanese President Bashir. For the remaining 60 positions, the local communities would agree by consensus on the nominees. (Note: These positions do not require President Bashir's approval. End note.) The three EF leaders also consented to the mediator's proposed nominees to the top three posts: EF Chairman Musa Mohammed Ahmed will be nominated for the Assistant to the President, Dr. Amna Dirar for the Advisor to the President and Mubrouk Mubarak Salim for the State ministerial position.

13. (C) Concerned over the political bickering between EF leaders and the continuing viability of the EF - and Eritrea's credibility should the ESPA crumble - the Eritrean mediators recently approached Dr. Taisier Ali of the Center for Peacekeeping in the Horn of Africa for training assistance. In response, Dr. Taisier is developing a week-long training program for 105 members of the EF, including those first 60 individuals nominated to the political positions. The

training will address issues of leadership and management and work toward the establishment of a much-needed formal structure for the EF. Dr. Taisier hoped the training will begin in early June, timing which appears too optimistic. The mediators have offered their full support; however, the level of commitment by the EF to the training remains uncertain. (Note: Earlier and similar training requested by the mediator following the signing of the ESPA was scheduled in fall 2006 and trainers flown in. Although the EF consented to the training and promised they would participate, on the first day of training, not a single member of the EF appeared. End Note.)

14. (C) The Sudanese People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), who are long-time allies of the EF and who participated in the ESPA negotiations as part of the Government of Sudan negotiating team, also expressed concerns. The week of May 14, they sent a message to the EF leaders pressing them to resolve their problems and stay together as a political entity. The message appears not to have bolstered the EF at all. According to Dr. Taisier, Musa dismissed the SPLM's plea, saying "the EF no longer exists." Dr. Amna echoed this sentiment in a conversation with Poloff, stating there was "no hope for the EF". She added that she was considering abandoning her position and moving to Doha as she could no longer live in Eritrea or Sudan.

MILITARY INTEGRATION STALLED

15. (C) Meanwhile, the integration of EF troops with Sudan's armed forces has not progressed. The EF armed rebels are a combination of the troops of the Beja Congress and the Rashaida Free Lions with each group paying and commanding their own troops. While most EF soldiers reportedly planned to return to civilian life, some were expected to join Sudan's military. The delays in implementing the integration have lead to desertions of EF soldiers as the EF (and more specifically the

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Beja Congress) is unable to pay its troops. According to Dr. Amna, nearly half of the Beja Congress troops (approximately 500) have already disappeared into civilian life, with any weapons they may have held. The Rashaida Free Lions troops are in a slightly better economic position due to their profitable import/export business in the region, and thus while most of the 3000 troops plan to become civilians, they continue to be paid and accounted for in the Free Lions troops.

THUG TACTICS & RABBLE ROUSING WITHIN EASTERN SUDAN

16. (C) Further jeopardizing the weak alliance are challenges within the Beja Congress to Dr. Dirar and increasing negative rhetoric from Eastern Sudan about the EF. Dr. Dirar claims two Beja Congress members recently challenged her leadership and physically threatened her in public over the issue of obtaining a greater share of political representation. At one public meeting with representatives of the Government of Sudan and the EF, two men hassled her and attempted to grab her, yet no one present intervened or rose to her support. In addition, Dr. Dirar told Poloff that a group from Eastern Sudan has emerged claiming to be the "People's Front for Eastern Sudan" and is launching a campaign against the EF in general, and more specifically, aimed at discrediting her. Although the group publicly claims they are supported by Ethiopia, Dr. Dirar speculates this effort is supported by the Government of Sudan's National Congress Party (NCP) as part of its efforts to undermine the EF.

COMMENT

17. (C) Since the inception of the EF as a political entity, the tentative alliance between the Beja Congress, (itself divisive between the Beja BeniAmer and Hadendawa tribes), the Rashaida Free Lions, and other smaller tribes of Eastern Sudan, has been an uneasy partnership. While many assume the greatest tension is between the Rashaida and the Beja, the difficulties within the Beja - particularly the personal difficulties between Musa and Dirar - are proving the most problematic to the viability of the EF. The fractures within the Beja Congress,

and the continuing unwillingness of the three EF leaders to build, develop and lead the EF organization is fulfilling the most pessimistic predictions that the ESPA could end up existing only on paper. As the EF slowly dissipates, the Eritreans have cause to be alarmed, and post anticipates the Eritreans will attempt to prop up the EF and keep them alive. The Eritreans have a lot riding on the success or failure of the ESPA as a demonstration of their government's ability to effectively take on a leadership role in the region and in support of their assertions of being the most suitable mediator for a Darfur negotiation. End Comment.

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